



Five Minutes to *Fire Safety*

Topic: Propping Doors Open

One of the most frequently asked questions from teachers and school administrators alike is why classroom doors can't be propped open. The answer to this (and almost every inspection-related question) is, "it depends!"

The question of classroom doors is one of separation. A quick glance at any life safety, building, or fire code will reveal some discussion or requirement for fire-rated separation in some specific location. The intent of the rated separation is to limit or control fire spread in such a way that it aids life safety, whether by protecting exits or allowing for some sort of sheltering.

When a fire-rated wall is designed by an architect, any hole in that wall - whether it's for electrical wires, plumbing, or a door or window - takes away from the integrity of that protection. This is why fire-rated caulk is required for filling any small holes in rated walls, and also why doors and windows in these walls must bear a specific fire-rating. If a door or window bears a fire-rating, you will be able to find the label somewhere on the assembly. Doors will typically have a metal plate screwed on to the top of the door or on the hinge side. Older doors may exhibit a small colored plug in one of these locations, instead of the metal plate.

In order for a fire-rated door to function, it must be closed. This is why fire-rated doors can only be held open by magnetic hold-open devices that are tied into the fire alarm system. If the fire alarm goes off the doors will automatically close and latch, allowing them to function properly. They can not be held open by wedges or kick-downs. If the doors are propped open with wedges or kick-down devices, they can not function properly in the event of a fire.

So, in a nutshell, fire-rated doors are there for a reason: they help protect the occupants and the building from fire spread. If a fire-rated door is between your classroom and the corridor, it can only be held open by a magnetic hold-open device that is tied to the fire alarm system, and the door must be able to latch at all times.

What about non-rated classroom doors? Stay tuned!

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